CONSTRUCTION COSTS

for Creating "Visit-ability" (Basic Access) in New Homes

1. Zero-Step Entrances:

Since all lots have to be graded for development, the key to keeping costs down is to position the house on the lot and grade the lot with the zero-step entrance in mind. (See our link to Zero-Step Entrances) When this is done, $150 is a reasonable average additional cost for the zero-step entrance. It should be remembered that visitability does not demand a front entrance if a side or back entrance is the most feasible.

Why such a low cost? Because:

1. for many homes the cost is zero and
2. on the approximately 5% to 10% of lots which are truly difficult, steps are actually needed at every entrance, and zero-step entrance is not feasible. (Again, see Zero-Step Entrances.)

When the cost is averaged over the remaining 90%+ of lots, the $150 average cost stated above is generously high.

Among the many homes where the zero-step entrance usually costs nothing are the 41% of all single-family homes in the U.S. which are built on a concrete slab*.

On the homes not built on a slab--those which have a basement or crawl space--there are several low-cost options. Over 2/3 of new homes have attached garages or carports.** Often the zero-step entrance can easily be constructed from the garage by planning the house floor and garage floor on the same level-- or nearly so -- rather than having the typical one or two steps up into the house. In those cases, either no ramp or a very short concrete ramp is all that is needed.

On homes with basements or crawl spaces, low-cost front, back or side entrances that do not require entering through the garage are often easy and inexpensive. Berming can allow a sidewalk or short "bridge" leading directly to the porch. Or, a short ramp may be all that is required, made of attractive materials with a deck-like appearance. In calculating cost, the cost of the omitted steps should be deducted from the cost of a ramp.

The very high cost estimates for zero-step entrances which some builders put forth are often based on ignorance of the best construction methods, or include averaging in worst-case scenarios which in fact should not be constructed at all.

2. Interior passage doors:

Interior passage doors should be 3'0" or 2'10" wide, including bathrooms (Passage doors are those that lead from one room to another, as opposed to closets.) Wide closet doors are good too, but way down the list from passage doors in terms of necessity. If a 3'0" or 2'10" door absolutely will not fit in a tight plan, 2'8" is much better than lesser widths. A 3'0" door provides about 34 inches of clear passage space, depending on the thickness

of the door which is hung; 2'10" doors provide about 32 inches of clear passage space; 2'8" provide about 30 inches. More door width is needed than the simple width of a wheelchair, because doors can not always be approached straight on..... just as a car needs a lane wider than the car itself to be able to turn a corner.

$50 per home is a generous average estimate for wide enough doors. In most cases, a wider opening is simply cut into the wall and an architect does not need to be called in to change the plans. The builder can adjust the existing plans with too-narrow doors by manually drawing a minor adjustment to the doorways on the plans. Adding square footage is not necessary to create adequately wide doors.

In a few cases, such as an unusually small bathroom, three or four inches may need to be shaved from an adjoining room, but again adding square footage is not the economical solution. (Another option in a small space is a pocket door.)

How wide should the passage doors be?

- Less than 2'8"----big trouble
- 2'8"---- better than nothing
- 2'10"----Ideal. This width is becoming increasingly available at low cost as customer demand increases. (2'10" is the interior door width required by the Fair Housing Amendment in new apartment buildings.)
- 3'0"----Excellent, where space allows.

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*Figure supplied by the National Association of Home Builders, based on nationwide statistics for 1994
**Figure supplied by NAHB, based on nationwide statistics for 1996.

Summary

- On new construction: $150 zero-step entrance plus $50 interior doors; total about $200 (about 1/3 the cost of one bay window).
- These costs can be compared to the costs of retrofitting:
  - --conservatively, an average of $1,000 to add a zero-step entrance to an existing home
  - --conservatively, an average of $700 to widen one existing doorway

Also relevant - other social and financial costs caused by architectural barriers:

- --The residents can't comfortably entertain friends and relatives who have mobility limitation.
- --A non-disabled person who experiences a temporary disability such as broken bones or recuperation from surgery must seek a different place to live

while recuperating, or try to rent temporary ramps and bedside commodes.

- --The residents strain their muscles carrying bicycles, baby carriages, heavy furniture, etc., up steps.
- --A resident may need to move permanently to a nursing home, while a lack of barriers would have allowed the person to stay at home for added months or years.
- --Resale or renting the home cuts out potential customers who have mobility limitation or who want a home that welcomes disabled visitors.

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